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FIGURE COMPOSITION IN PHOTOGRAPHY

BY TUDOR JENKS

Illustrated from photographs by E. S. Bennett.



A MODERN CHARLOTTE CORDAY

PHOTOGRAPHY is the legitimate daughter of art, and science is but her nurse. The motive that urged men to fix the image of the camera obscura, was the love of the beautiful rather than the desire of knowledge. The manifold applications of the camera to industries and commerce tend to obscure its lineage; and the professional photographer, who must consider first the commercial side of his business, naturally lends himself to his art's degradation. His patrons pay for resemblance, and to secure resemblance with the least expenditure of time, taste, and trouble, will bring him the most general and best-paying custom. But the amateur should be an artist. He can never compete with professionals upon their chosen field, but he has already shown that where pure art is concerned the professional is out of the race.

The artistic quality to which photography can best establish its claim is composition—the arrangement of objects artistically. The draftsman should excel in accent, the colorist in harmony, and chiaroscuro may well be studied by both as a means toward reaching any especial quality. But in photography accent is reached only through “dodges” in printing or retouching, and color-harmony is out of the question. But composition is for the photographer as for the draftsman or colorist. From given objects he may construct a picture or make a hotch-potch; and his artistic rank is determined by his position between these extremes.

With this paper are some illustrations of picture-making, with special reference to the possibilities of composition before the camera. The picture, for example, “No Thoroughfare,” is one where the grouping is good, the attitudes are pleasing, and the composition is simple and effective. It is lacking only in a bit of “Sherlock Holmes” detail. If the notice were real, the gate would be closed, or at least capable of



NO THOROUGHFARE



THE DRYAD'S PATH

being closed ; and now the sign is so placed that the gate must shut against it.

"The Dryad's Path" is excellently composed, in that the attention is concentrated on the figure, the lines of the pose are graceful, and the masses sufficiently broken. Possibly the picture would have gained in suggestiveness if the eyes had been directed downward. Best of all is "The Cross-cut."



THE CROSS-CUT

The lines are charmingly varied, the dark points well placed, and the broad lights harmonized. The avoidance of the vertical line gives a subtle suggestion of motion. This picture it would be difficult to improve.

Taken altogether, the pictures are pleasing and satisfactory—and what an advance they are over the hide-bound subject with his head in a vise, and his hand on a truncated pillar !



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